On Sunday afternoon, June 26, 2011, Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee started their eastern Lake Erie dive season by travelling to Barcelona, NY, to do some wreck diving with Capt. Jim Herbert and Osprey Charter. At the dock was Osprey's boat "Southwind" with John, the new deckhand who is replacing Mike this summer after Mike had to start working the day shift during weekends with his regular employer. There were a total of 11 divers, including Jack Papes, John Gavroy, Jacques Girouard, George Balas, Adam Poniknar, Jimmy Herbert, Jr., and of course John, who would be tying in the new mooring.

The weather for the trip was a pleasant 70 deg F with sunny blue skies and calm seas. After the boat was loaded, it headed out into the lake to the intended wreck, "Barge F," an unidentified wooden barge in 145' of water about 10 miles offshore. It was first dove in August, 2001, after it was located by Capt. Jim. The ship's identity remains a mystery, however, and its unusual canal boat style of construction adds to its allure. After reaching the waters above the wreck, John jumped in and set the mooring for everyone else to use. After the first divers jumped into the water, it was obvious there was a strong W current the divers had to swim against to reach the mooring at the "Southwind's" bow. Once submerged, the surface visibility was 10'-15' with a 65 deg F surface temperature. A diffuse thermocline was encountered at 35'-40', and below this was 50' of visibility and 42 deg F water. Bright ambient lighting was on the bottom that did not require a light to see the wreck.

The mooring was attached near the bow, which points north. The bow is fairly blunt and rounded, and the wreck stands only several feet high off the bottom at this location. Around the outside of the hull at almost deck level is a very prominent raised wooden rub rail, which runs around the entire perimeter of the ship. A one foot-high gunwale is also present that runs around the perimeter of the ship, but no railing or stanchions are visible anywhere above this low gunwale. At the extreme bow is a small notch cut into the stem for a towrope. Surrounding this notch are raised blocks to form a line chock. Behind this is a large square tow bitt, or samson post, where the towrope would have been attached. There are hawse holes on both sides of the bow, and anchor chains run out of these holes, over the top of the gunwale, and across the deck to a windlass immediately behind the tow bitt. The chains are draped over the windlass' drum on both sides. The windlass' pawl bitt is relatively small and has a rocker mechanism on top to allow handles to be inserted to ratchet the windlass. The mechanical linkages from the pawl to the windlass drum are intact and easily viewed.

A chain locker opening is on the deck next to the windlass on the port side, and on the starboard side is an anchor lying flat on the deck. The anchor's stock is either folded or missing. A single-barreled hand pump with linkages and a handle coming out of its top

is behind the windlass and offset slightly to the starboard side. Several feet behind the pump is a completely separate deck winch of almost equal size to the windlass with two separate drums. The forward drum is larger and has prominent wooden whelps. There is large belt wheel attached on the starboard side and end spools on both sides. The smaller drum aft also has end spools on both sides. Two pistons appear to be mounted axially along both the port and starboard sides of the winch under the drums. Additionally, there is piping on the starboard side with an open connection coupler, hand valve, and control levers. From the appearance of this winch, it was likely steam powered. However, the lack of any donkey boiler on the wreck and the presence of an open connection coupling suggest the winch may have been intended only for use at specialized service docks where it would have been connected to external steam service. Perhaps this is a clue to the ship's identity and/or intended service.

Lying on the deck on the port side next to the winch is another anchor, but this one is standing on its metal stock. Behind the deck winch begins a large cargo opening that is continuous and runs for approximately a third of the ship's length. It is divided into five discrete sections by simple beams running across the width of the opening. The hold has large chunks of coal, which was its cargo, peeking out of the silt. On both sides of the cargo opening is decking about 10' wide with occasional sets of bitts along the gunwales. On the starboard side amidships, several deck boards are missing, which was not the case several years ago. Enough boards are missing that the inside of the cargo hold can be seen at this location, and a strange metal object can be seen embedded in the silt inside. Furthermore, off the port side on the bottom up against the ship amidships is another metal object roughly shaped like a cooking pot but with a large hole in it. Both items are deeply embedded in the bottom, covered in mussels, and could not be clearly identified.

Aft of the cargo hold is a large flat deck with an older style capstan on the centerline. In raised letters on top of the capstan are the words "J.W. Henry, Quebec and Lawrence Foundry." Offset to the starboard side is another single-cylinder hand pump with linkages and a handle coming out of it. It is almost identical to the first pump in size and placement. On the centerline sticking out of the deck is a small vertical pipe bent over to the starboard side halfway up its length. Aft of this pipe is a moderately sized rectangular opening in the center of the deck. Further aft and offset to the port side is another slightly smaller rectangular opening with wooden walls below deck on the port and starboard sides, a fallen ladder at the bottom, and wooden debris sticking out of the silt. It is likely the forward deck opening served as a skylight to allow light and ventilation below deck, and the smaller aft opening was a companionway to allow access below deck. Immediately behind the aft companionway at the extreme stern is a steering wheel with a chain-wrapped drum behind it. This chain heads off to both sides

and disappears through holes in the deck. This is a transitional steering system, which uses a wheel and chain to turn a tiller below deck. This steering system was common in the mid-1800s in the Great Lakes. The stern stands about 5'-8' high off the bottom and is scoured out underneath. Visible is the top of the rudder, which is turned hard to port. The stern is rounded in shape, and the hull is sharply undercut down to the rudder. The wooden rub rail has recently come loose in this area, and a piece hangs down to the bottom at the extreme stern.

The ship overall appears to be a specialized coal hauling barge, possible in the short haul between the American and Canadian sides. The anchor, windlass, and steering styles all suggest a roughly mid-1800s construction, and this is further supported by the canal boat style of construction. Hopefully in the future, more will be learned about this unusual wreck and its identity solved.

After the dive Cindy and Kevin decided to take advantage of the strong W current and performed a scenic drift dive towards Buffalo. They made it about 1/2 mile before being picked up by Jim Herbert, smashing Jack Papes' previous distance record set on the "Trade Wind" on Saturday, June 11. Bottom time was 20 minutes, total run time was 42 minutes, 25/20 trimix was used with 50% O2, and a maximum depth of 143' was achieved.

For those who are interested, Jack Papes has posted a set of photos of the dive.
http://www.n2junkie.com/gallery/flash/lake_erie_flash_pages/20110626_BargeF/